



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

February 15, 2005

Ms. Julie Joe
Assistant County Attorney
Travis County
P.O. Box 1748
Austin, Texas 78767

OR2005-01391

Dear Ms. Joe:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 218771.

The Travis County Attorney's Office (the "county attorney") received a request for any and all information in the county attorney's possession regarding a specified case. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we note that the submitted information includes documents that have been filed with a court. Section 552.022 provides:

(a) Without limiting the amount or kind of information that is public information under this chapter, the following categories of information are public information and not excepted from required disclosure under this chapter unless they are expressly confidential under other law:

....

(17) information that is also contained in the public court record[.]

Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(17). Section 552.022(a)(17) makes information filed with a court expressly public. Therefore, the county attorney may withhold this information only to the extent it is made confidential under other law. Although the county attorney claims section 552.108, this exception is discretionary and does not constitute other law for the purposes of section 552.022. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally), 177 at 3 (1977) (statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.108 subject to waiver). Therefore, the county attorney may not withhold court-filed documents under section 552.108. We have marked these documents for release pursuant to section 552.022(a)(17).

We next address your claim under section 552.108 for the remaining submitted information. Section 552.108 provides, in pertinent part:

(a) Information held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime is excepted from [required public disclosure] if:

...

(4) it is information that:

(A) is prepared by an attorney representing the state in anticipation of or in the course of preparing for criminal litigation; or

(B) represents the mental impressions or legal reasoning of an attorney representing the state.

Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(4). When a request essentially seeks the entire prosecution file, the information is excepted from disclosure in its entirety pursuant to the holding in *Curry v. Walker*, 873 S.W.2d 379 (Tex. 1994) (discovery request for district attorney's entire litigation file may be denied because decision of what to include in file necessarily reveals prosecutor's mental impressions or legal reasoning). In this instance, we agree that the records request encompasses the county attorney's entire case file. *Curry* thus provides that the release of the remaining information would reveal the county attorney's mental impressions or legal reasoning. Thus, we find that subsection 552.108(a)(4) of the Government Code applies to the remaining submitted information.

We note, however, that section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. *Id.* We believe such basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle Publishing Company v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). In Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976), this office

summarized the types of information made public pursuant to *Houston Chronicle*. See Open Records Decision No. 127 at 4 (1976). Thus, with the exception of basic information, the remaining submitted information may be withheld under section 552.108. As we are able to make this determination, we need not address your remaining arguments.

In summary, the county attorney must release the marked court-filed documents pursuant to section 552.022(a)(17). With the exception of basic offense and arrest information, which must be released, the county attorney may withhold the remaining submitted information pursuant to section 552.108 of the Government Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Tex. Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or

complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc Barenblat", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marc A. Barenblat
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

MAB/sdk

Ref: ID# 218771

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Frank T. Ivy
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(w/o enclosures)